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Source: *Western Folklore*, Vol. 52, No. 1, Perspectives on the Innocent Persecuted Heroine in Fairy Tales (Jan., 1993), pp. 85-104
Published by: Western States Folklore Society
Stable URL: http://www.jstor.org/stable/1499495
Accessed: 29-11-2015 14:35 UTC

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Going Up in the World: Class in "Cinderella"

ELISABETH PANTTAJA

Modern criticism of the Grimms' "Cinderella" has focused almost exclusively on issues in female psychology.[1] This has been true, not only for psychoanalytic critics, who have professed to see certain universal psychic dramas in the tale, but also for more recent feminist and neo-Marxist critics.[2] By showing that the cultural values inscribed in the tales (such as female passivity and paternal domination) belong to particular interest groups and further particular socio-political aims, feminist and neo-Marxist critics have successfully historicized and politicized the Grimms' ouevre. But these critics have also, and perhaps unwittingly, retained several key psychoanalytic assumptions about fairy tales and human nature which have tended to pull their projects in essentially conservative directions. Specifically, they have shared with psychoanalytic critics the idea that the power and interest

1. I am treating the Grimms' "Cinderella," rather than any one of numerous other versions of the tale, because that is the version which has received the most extensive and serious critical consideration and because my subject is as much the criticism of the tale as it is the tale itself. All references to "Cinderella," then, unless otherwise stated, are to the *The Complete Fairy Tales of the Brothers Grimm*, Jack Zipes, ed. and trans. (1987) pp. 86–92. Zipes's translation is of the seventh and last edition of the Grimms' *Kinder- und Hausmärchen*, published in Germany in 1857. The particular version of "Cinderella" recorded by the Grimms is a mixture of two oral tales, one from an anonymous woman in a hospital in Marburg, the other from Dorothea Viehmann, a tailor's wife who sold fruit in the Grimms' hometown of Kassel and who told the brothers a number of significant tales (Zipes 1987:716, xxiv). This version was published in the first, 1812 edition and appeared in all the succeeding editions of the *Kinder- und Hausmärchen*. The motifs and themes of this particular story are not identical to the overall tale type of "Cinderella"; accordingly, my analysis pertains only to this particular version, not to the tale type as a whole, which is comprised of hundreds of different versions, each with its own emphases and allomotifs.

2. For psychoanalytic readings of "Cinderella," see Bruno Bettelheim (1976), Heuscher (1963), Rubinstein (1982), Von Franz (1982) and Tatar (1987). For feminist and Marxist readings of "Cinderella" and the tales, see Rowe (1979), Lieberman (1972), Stone (1975, 1985), Zipes (1983) and Bottigheimer (1988).

Western Folklore 52 (January, 1993): 85–104

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of fairy tales reside in their ability to shape young psyches and, second, the idea that the modern psyche is shaped primarily through the differentiation of the sexes. In keeping with these assumptions, feminist and neo-Marxist critics have tended to view the tales as either patriarchal or bourgeois propaganda, as a socializing tool designed to create good little (modern) boys and girls.

Thus, even though they are politically more sophisticated, the feminist and neo-Marxist interpretations that have been written so far continue to *feel* the same as the older, psychoanalytic readings. Regardless of whatever ideas about history and power inform them at the theoretical level, at the practical level they continue to derive the meanings of individual tales from highly privatized contexts, contexts divorced from political, economic, and, to some extent, historical realities, and they do this largely because their interpretive insights continue to be organized around the twin categories of gender and psychology. By making a psychologized notion of gender their dominant analytical category, feminist critics like Kay Stone (1975) have tended to write criticism which focuses on the personal and sexual aspects of the tales. In this methodology, the female drama particularly (and often to the extent that it is viewed precisely *as* a female drama) is primarily psychological, separate from or, at best, tangential to socio-political struggles. At the same time, neo-Marxist critics like Jack Zipes (1983), sympathetic to the feminist cause, have taken up this same notion of gender and added it on to their socio-political analyses, without necessarily integrating the sex-gender system with the socio-political one. The conundrum of these approaches, then, is that while they profess to deplore the de-politicized heroine, they have tended to re-inscribe the very concepts and values which understand the heroine's text in private, sexual, and psychological terms. To the extent that they make gender the sole important analytic category, valorize the family as a locus of sexual desire and psycho-sexual indoctrination, and separate the sex-gender system from the socio-political system, to that extent do they limit our appreciation of the heroine's cultural presence and political function.

If we are willing to set aside, for a moment, the psychological and developmental models which have shaped so much modern criticism of the fairy tale, we can retrieve meanings that lie just outside our present critical vision. These retrieved meanings, as we shall see, are political and androgynous. They place the heroine at the heart of political struggle and make her a representative, not of the category

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of *woman,* but of a particular social group. From the perspective afforded by this new reading, we can then look back at the existing critical discourse to see how culturally pervasive and essentially conservative psychoanalytic assumptions about women have contributed to the privatization of female struggle in literary criticism.

Cinderella and Her Mother

The element of the Cinderella story most repressed by modern critics has been the mother/daughter plot. Maria Tatar's (1987) treatment of the mother figure in "Cinderella" is fairly typical: she sees the two mother figures in the story (the good, real mother and the wicked stepmother) as two halves of a single figure. She argues that the wicked stepmother is the more significant figure of the two because it is the negative feelings toward mother (sexual jealousy in particular) with which the story is most concerned. In this way, Tatar devalues the role and influence of the (good) mother, seeing her primarily in comparative terms. Bruno Bettelheim's (1976) treatment of the mother figure includes this concept of splitting but is considerably more complex. He tackles the problem of the mother from two additional perspectives, both of which tend to abrogate the mother's power. First, Bettelheim assumes the orthodox Freudian position which subordinates the mother's role to the presumably more important role of the father in the female Oedipal conflict (1976:245–50). In this scenario, Cinderella's (good) mother is the pre-Oedipal mother, important primarily as an internalized image, an artifact of the child's early experience of basic trust (1976:257–8). The death of Cinderella's mother at the beginning of the story, therefore, symbolically expresses Cinderella's entry into a higher state of maturation, one which is defined in part by motherlessness. Indeed, Freudian theory tends to conceive of autonomy in terms of separation from the mother. In a second strategy, Bettelheim treats the mother and Cinderella herself from what could be called a Jungian allegorical position. This reading views Cinderella as a descendent and/or devotee of the once-powerful Hera, Greek goddess of the hearth, whose power and status have suffered as a result of Christian domination. Cinderella's orphaned state and her devalued role as kitchenmaid are then symbols of her tragic separation from matriarchal culture, and her final restoration to a position of power and influence represents the (hoped for) return of the mother goddess's prestige (1976:253–5).

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Despite their differences, Freudian and Jungian strategies for understanding the mother figure have one thing in common: they both depend upon/establish the idea of maternal absence, an idea which resonates throughout many varieties of psychoanalytic thought. Both strategies locate maternal power in a bygone time—either pre-Oedipal or pre-patriarchal. To the extent that they view the mother/child relationship as thwarted by what is generally conceived of as the rather violent entry of the father/patriarchy, both positions inherently privilege paternal power over maternal power. Paternal power is generally conceived of as present, political power, the power of language, law, reason, and culture, while maternal power is conceived of as past and primitive, existing only in the devalued realm of the natural, which includes personal, private, specific, affective, pre-verbal, and even pre-social meanings. To the extent that psychoanalytic theory understands the mother's influence as an always-prior and primarily affective event, it is blind to the active roles that mothers play in personal histories beyond the infant stage, in family or social power relations, and in collective historic struggles. The psychoanalytic figuration of the mother is thus highly paradoxical: she is immensely powerful and relatively insignificant. Her power is associated with creativity and origins, but that very gesture consigns her to absence and non-identity. In this way, psychoanalysis perpetuates a myth of maternal power while at the same time denying a reality of maternal power. Not incidentally, it insinuates a certain unseemliness or inappropriateness to anything but the "natural" maternal role and therefore succeeds in trivializing or pathologizing virtually any display of rational or self-conscious maternal influence.

It is not surprising, then, that modern criticism of "Cinderella," which even when it is not overtly psychological tends to rely heavily on psychoanalytic paradigms, has been so strangely indifferent to the role that Cinderella's mother plays in the story. In our post-Freudian world, Cinderella's mother is imagined as absent despite the fact that she plays a central part in the unfolding of Cinderella's destiny. Indeed, Cinderella's mother's role is far from marginal: the words and actions of Cinderella's mother are of vital importance in narrative sequencing and the overall "moral" of the story. The Grimms' version of "Cinderella" opens significantly with the dying mother's injunction to the soon-to-be-orphaned girl. On her deathbed, the mother gives Cinderella the following advice: "Dear child, be good and pious. Then the dear Lord shall always assist you, and I shall look down from

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heaven and take care of you" (Zipes 1987:86). In fairy tales, the opening scene is always of particular importance, since it is here that the tale sets forth the problem which it will then go on to solve. Cinderella's problem is precisely the fact that her mother has died. It is this "lack," the lack of the mother, which Cinderella must overcome in the course of the story. The narrative instantly complicates her task by staging the arrival of a powerful mother and her two daughters, who, in the strength of their unity, hope to vanquish the motherless girl. Thus the story quickly amplifies the mother/daughter theme, rubbing salt, if you will, in Cinderella's wound. For just as Cinderella's powerlessness is a result of her mother's death, so the stepsisters' power is associated with their strong, scheming mother. In short order, then, Cinderella finds herself in need of her mother's good advice, and it is through keeping her mother's advice that she manages to overcome her own social isolation and the plots of her enemies. In the end, Cinderella rises to a position of power and influence, and she accomplishes this, apparently, despite her motherless status.

But is she really motherless? Not really, since the twig that she plants on her mother's grave grows into a tree that takes care of her, just as her mother promised to do. The mother, then, is figured in the hazel tree and in the birds that live in its branches. Early in the story, the tree offers solace to the grieving girl; later, it gives her the dresses she needs to attend the ball. Likewise, the two pigeons who live in the tree expose the false brides as they ride away, with bleeding feet, on the prince's horse, and they lead the flock of birds who help Cinderella sort the lentils that the stepmother throws on the hearth. In addition, the fleeing Cinderella is said to find safety in a dovecote and a pear tree ("a beautiful tall tree covered with the most wonderful pears"). Since these places of refuge continue the bird/tree symbolism, it is quite possible that we are meant to see the mother's influence also at work in the rather mysterious way that Cinderella manages to avoid too-early detection. Thus, at every turn in the narrative, the magical power of the mother vies with the forces arrayed against Cinderella, whether they be the selfish designs of the stepmother and stepsisters or the futile attempts of the father and prince to capture and identify her. In the end, the mother, despite death, reigns supreme. Not only does she take her revenge on her daughter's enemies by plucking out the eyes of the stepsisters, but, more importantly, she succeeds in bringing about her daughter's advantageous marriage. The happy ending proves that it is the mother, after all, who has been the power

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of the story. Cinderella's success resides in the fact that, while apparently motherless, she is in fact well-mothered. In spite of death, the mother/daughter dyad has kept its bonds intact. At its most basic level, the story is about this mother/daughter relationship. It is about the daughter's loyalty to the (good) mother's words and the mother's continuing, magical influence in the (good) daughter's life.

Unlike the narratives favored by psychoanalysis, which are about maternal absence and disempowerment, this tale tells a story about a strong mother/daughter relationship that actively shapes events. Cinderella's mother performs a specific social function vis-à-vis her daughter—she assists in her coming out. Her gifts are directed toward a specific goal—to help Cinderella into an advantageous marriage. From this perspective, what is most interesting about Cinderella's mother is her similarity to the stepmother. These two women share the same devotion to their daughters and the same long-term goals: each mother wants to ensure a future of power and prestige for her daughter, and each is willing to resort to extreme measures to achieve her aim. Thus, Cinderella's mother is a paradoxical figure: while her power is associated at the outset with the power of the Christian god and while she seems to instruct Cinderella in the value of long-suffering self-sacrifice, she is also a wily competitor. She plots and schemes, and she wins. She beats the stepmother at the game of marrying off daughters. She does for Cinderella exactly what the wicked stepmother wishes to do for her own daughters—she gets her married to the "right" man.

Considering the similarities in their goals and strategies, the idea that Cinderella and her mother are morally superior to the stepsisters and their mother is shot through with contradictions. Throughout the tale, there exists a structural tension between the character that is drawn thematically (the pious Cinderella) and the character that acts in the narrative (the shrewd, competitive Cinderella). The superficial moral of the story would have us believe that Cinderella's triumph at the ball is a reward for her long-suffering patience. But while Cinderella's piety does play an important role in the forging of her supernatural alliance, it plays almost no role in the important practical business of seducing the prince. Indeed, the battle for the prince's attention is not waged at the level of character at all but at the level of clothes. Cinderella wins the battle because her mother is able, through magic, to provide raiment so stunning that no ordinary dress can compete. Cinderella's triumph at the ball has less to do with her innate goodness and more to do with her loyalty to the dead mother and a

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string of subversive acts: she disobeys the stepmother, enlists forbidden helpers, uses magic powers, lies, hides, dissembles, disguises herself, and evades pursuit. The brutal ending of the tale, in which Cinderella allows the mother (in the form of two pigeons) to peck out the eyes of the stepsisters, further complicates the story's moral thematics.

Just as there is a structural tension between the tale's thematization of Cinderella's goodness and the actual plot, so there is a tension between plot and the alleged theme of romantic love. I say "alleged" here because, although modern readers and critics have sought to enshrine romantic love as a central value of the tale, there is actually nothing in the text itself to suggest either that Cinderella loves the prince or that the prince loves her.[3] The prince marries Cinderella because he is enchanted (literally) by the sight of her in her magical clothes. What is interesting about these clothes, at least in the Grimms' version, is that, far from simply enhancing a natural but hidden beauty, they actually create it. In the Grimms' version, Cinderella is described as "deformed," while the sisters are described as "fair," so we can only conclude that the power of Cinderella's clothes is indeed miraculous, since they turn a deformed girl into a woman whose beauty surpasses that of the already fair. Thus, the prince's choice of Cinderella can be explained neither by her piety, which he has never experienced, nor by her own beauty, which does not exist. It is the mother's magic which brings about the desired outcome, an outcome in which the prince has actually very little choice. The prince's oft-repeated statement, "She's my partner," as well as his obsessive tracking down of the true bride, suggests that he is operating under a charm rather than as an autonomous character, and the fact that both these motifs are repeated three times is further evidence that magic, not free choice, is at work here.

This is not surprising: the enchantment of a potential marriage partner is one of the most common motifs in fairy tales and mythology. The motif of an enchanted or somehow disguised bride or bridegroom usually appears in tales that depict some kind of unusual

3. In his discussion of what he calls "ethical criticism," Fredric Jameson (1981) describes the tendency of some literary criticism to project onto a text the values and preoccupations of the present generation of literary critics. Ethical criticism, says Jameson,

> projects as permanent features of human 'experience,' and thus as a kind of 'wisdom' about personal life and interpersonal relations, what are in reality the historical and institutional specifics of a determinate type of group solidarity or class cohesion. [1981:59]

This type of reading tends to obliterate what Jameson calls "the specificity and radical difference of the social and cultural past" (1981:18).

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marriage, either the marriage of a god or demon to a human (Cupid and Psyche) or the marriage of a poor or ordinary mortal to a member of the deity or the nobility (Beauty and the Beast). The idea, of course, is that one member, by being disguised or by disguising another, can enter into a marriage that he or she would not normally enter into, usually one that crosses class lines. Thus, the enchantment of a prospective bride or bridegroom has more to do with power and manipulation than it does with romance or affection. Rather than talking about Cinderella's love for the prince, then, it is more accurate to say that Cinderella, in alliance with her mother, bewitches the prince in order to gain the power and prestige that will accrue to her upon her marriage to a member of the nobility.

If "Cinderella" does not thematize morality or romantic love, what cultural values *are* at work in the tale? We can begin to answer this question by noting that the tale seems to have a general appreciation for the politics of marriage and a keen interest in the question of who marries whom. Both Cinderella and the stepsisters want to marry the prince for obvious reasons. And yet, the tale seems to be saying, not just anyone can marry a prince. Only someone special, like Cinderella can. We are meant to believe that marriage to a prince is Cinderella's rightful destiny, while it is not the rightful destiny of the sisters. Why? To answer this question, we need to look beyond the text to larger historical issues at stake in the tales as a whole.

Feudalism vs. the Bourgeoisie

"The milieu of the fairy tales reflects feudal agrarian conditions, and the characters are either of the nobility, peasantry, or third estate (*burgher*)," writes Jack Zipes (1983). "Though it is clear that the classical fairy tale is stamped by feudalism," Zipes continues, "the narrative perspective . . . fuses a peasant world view with the democratic-humanitarianism of the rising-bourgeoisie" (148–9). Zipes convincingly argues that fairy tales played an important role in the rise of the bourgeoisie. Calling the fairy tale "one of the cornerstones of our bourgeois heritage," Zipes (1983) characterizes the genre as "an institutionalized discourse with manipulation as one of its components" (10). The fairy tale's discourse was aimed specifically at "socializing children to meet definitive normative expectations at home and in the public sphere" (9). Certainly, this seems to have been the case. Throughout the nineteenth century, the Grimms' and a wide variety

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of other folktale collections were widely published and circulated in Europe and America, and the popularity of the fairy tale grew to amazing proportions. By the 1870s, the tales were routinely included in primers and educational anthologies for children throughout the western world. By the beginning of the twentieth century, the Grimms' *Kinder-und Hausmärchen* was outsold only by the Bible in Germany (it continues to hold this position) (Zipes 1987:xxix).

This period, during which the fairy tale became a virtual literary institution, also saw massive social and economic shifts, such as rapid industrialization and urbanization, as well as the spread of bourgeois cultural hegemony. Fairy tales played an important part in this transformation of society. In Germany, for example, the fairy tale was presumed to speak in the voice of the true German folk. In their alleged timelessness and cultural authority, it was supposed that fairy tales could impart the true German folk-soul to the new German people, people whose lifestyle had become radically disjointed from the cultural past. In meeting this challenge, however, the fairy tale had to contain a fundamental paradox. It was supposed to be exotic, to speak for and contain what was most "other" to the cultural experience of the newly industrialized world, but it was also supposed to contain only the most ordinary and expectable cultural values, values which could assist in the work of correctly socializing large groups of bourgeois boys and girls. Thus, while the fairy tale was valued precisely because it was so obviously *not* bourgeois, it was expected at the same time to be pre-eminently bourgeois. Perhaps the most interesting and problematic aspect of the fairy tale is this dual agenda: its need to preserve past cultural experience (including the often contradictory moral and social positions of both the "folk" and the feudal lords) and its goal of helping to create a very different present.

This complicated agenda does not come off without a hitch; indeed, the tales often show the strain of such a heavy ideological burden. Many critics have pointed to jarring dissonances within the tales, places of conflict between past and present values and among folk, bourgeois, and aristocratic kinds of experience. In some cases, the ideological ground of the tales is so shifting that the tale delivers on its cultural mandate only imperfectly, with the result that bourgeois children end up being educated in ideals that are distinctly un-bourgeois. "Cinderella" is perhaps one of the most interesting examples of a tale that manages to blend its exoticism and bourgeois ordinariness in ways that slip the ideological yoke of the fairy tale as literary

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institution. In "Cinderella," the discord between feudal and bourgeois values, attitudes, and aesthetics is overtly thematized in the conflict between Cinderella and her mother and the stepsisters and their mother, only in "Cinderella" it is the aristocratic order, not the new bourgeois order, which is conceived of as superior. Unlike many other tales which reward the cunning upstart, "Cinderella" prizes innate nobility over striving, and reserves the happy ending for the daughter of the "pure" past instead of the daughters of the aspiring middle class.

It is in the difference between Cinderella and the sisters that the fairy tale turns its ideological screw, and this difference is fundamentally a class difference. Cinderella is the true bride; the stepsisters are ambitious deceivers. Cinderella belongs at the court; the sisters are interlopers there. Cinderella's marriage to the prince is her right and fitting destiny, while, in the very brutality and desperation of their manipulations, the stepsisters show that they have no legitimate claim to the marriage they seek. They are coarse, petty, and ambitious, empty of the innate grace that marks the gentility. The anxiety of the tale lies in the possibility that the prince might marry one of these women, that class distinctions, here represented as inborn character traits, could be blurred or erased. Such a marriage would change the make-up of the ruling group, polluting it with the wrong blood. This is exactly what the sisters want: to substitute themselves for Cinderella and thereby to usurp a higher class position. They acquire a foothold in Cinderella's home, but they are not satisfied. They proceed to demote and disguise Cinderella: they disrobe her, give her old clothes, set her to do the coarse and menial work of the class beneath them, and give her a generic name, a name that belies specialness. What's more, they forbid Cinderella to go to the king's festival. Since the festival is the place that has been designated for the king's son to choose a bride, excluding Cinderella from it is much more than a petty meanness: it is an attempt to interfere in aristocratic marriage and kinship rituals. For, by keeping the true bride away from the festival, the stepsisters hope to be able to substitute one of themselves in her place and thus gain entry to halls of power from which they were previously excluded. But the story clearly sets this rebellion in the "proper" political and moral light by making the stepsisters coarse and reprehensible, by making their ambitious gyrations demeaning, and in the case of their self-mutilation, abhorrent. By showing that there is no length to which they will not go, the story treats them as

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morally and socially inferior, thus re-inscribing (or inventing?) classist notions about the shrill, opportunistic, and ambition-driven middle class. By maintaining—indeed, by insisting on—the difference between Cinderella and the sisters, the fairy tale speaks out *against* bourgeois cultural hegemony.

"Cinderella" appears to be one tale, therefore, in which the narrative perspective is more feudal than middle class. In this respect, it is similar to a tale like "The Goose Girl" which upholds the (lawful) interests of the aristocratic protagonist against the (unjust) claims of an ambitious servant. In "The Goose Girl," the daughter of a queen is kept from marrying a prince by her handmaid, who disguises her and takes her place at the wedding. Later, however, through the absent mother's magical help, the real princess, now a mere "goose girl," is able to expose the imposter and accede to the throne. Not incidentally, the usurping servant is then made to suffer a horrendous execution, which, according to the moral logic of the fairy tale, is conceived of as just. The true bride/false bride theme of this story is clearly related to class conflict. To a great extent, it is their class identities which make one bride "true" and the other "false." By making the protagonist pure and good and giving her magical power and by making the aspiring servant coarse and scheming and depriving her of supernatural help, the fairy tale clearly indicates whose claims and grievances it considers rightful. In this way, it naturalizes its own ideological position, taking it out of the realm of the socio-political and putting it into the realm of the moral and religious.

"Cinderella" participates in these same thematics while at the same time displacing the argument from an aristocratic/working class conflict to a conflict enacted within the ranks of the bourgeoisie. As the "daughter of a rich man," Cinderella is a middle class girl, and so presumably are the sisters. Nevertheless, as her father's biological (rather than adopted) daughter and as part of his first family, Cinderella's claim to social prominence is portrayed as more just and defensible than that of the sisters, who appear in the story as socially displaced persons. As relative newcomers to the scene and with an indeterminate paternity, the sisters play the role of parvenue to Cinderella's role of genteel-bourgeois. What is most interesting about the intra-class conflict of "Cinderella" is the way it replicates the terms and values of the princess/servant conflict enacted in "The Goose Girl" and other tales. Though Cinderella is not an actual princess, she takes on the salient characterological feature of the aristocracy—i.e., its

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honor or innate virtue—and, in so doing, she reinscribes the same classist notions which could conceivably be used against herself. As Michael McKeon (1987) points out, the concept of honor served for centuries as a powerful ideological tool for preserving the traditional social order. On one hand, says McKeon, the possession of honor corresponds to the possession of outward properties such as ancestry, wealth, and political power, but, more importantly,

> honor is an essential and inward property of its possessor, that which the conditional or extrinsic signifiers of honor exist to signify. In this respect, honor is equivalent to an internal element of "virtue." The notion of honor as a unity of outward circumstance and inward essence is the most fundamental justification for the hierarchical stratification of society by status, and it is so fundamental as to be largely tacit. [1987:131]

In this system, virtue is an inherited characteristic that indelibly marks the nobility, separating them from the lower ranks. Thus, continues McKeon, "the social order is not circumstantial and arbitrary, but corresponds to and expresses an analogous, intrinsic moral order" (1987:131).

This naturalization of aristocratic power is used by the fairy tale to defend the rights of the aristocracy against the working class ("The Goose Girl") and the genteel-bourgeois against the nouveau-riche ("Cinderella"). "The Goose Girl" and "Cinderella" are alike in that they are designed to assuage upper-class fears about the rising and clamourous lower classes who would substitute their coarse and scheming daughters for the "true bride," the bride whose seeming lack of ambition and anxiety is the mark of a higher social rank. Thus, despite the fact that Cinderella is a middle class protagonist, the narrative perspective of the tale is more feudal than bourgeois. By making Cinderella, who internalizes aristocratic values, so much more preferable to the sisters, who exhibit offensive lower class traits, the tale perpetuates traditional ideas about character and status. It valorizes and perpetuates many of the exclusionary and elitist practices of the feudal system.

To the extent that the story's overt political content is about the preservation of a pure aristocratic or elite class, the story's values are actually historically prior to middle class ideas of romantic love, sexual attraction, and/or family romance. As Anita Levy (1989) points out, concepts of blood and alliance are integral to kinship arrangements in

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pre-modern societies, while concepts of gender and sexuality (as we understand them) are not fully operative until modern times. In feudal times, especially among the elite, endogamy is prized over exogamy. Members of the elite marry each other. Marriage to someone who is *like* oneself is the way that aristocratic and noble family lines remain "pure." The purity of the blood is the salient feature of the individual, and the marriage of pure aristocratic to pure aristocratic is the highest good because it preserves the aristocratic power structure and, at the same time, excludes other classes. An unsullied blood line retained its almost magical power no matter what gender the person might be. Levy writes that, in the aristocratic community,

> Kinship and kingship were one and the same. Kinship and the sexual practices associated with it were a form of power that determined political alliances as well as enmities. The stability and longevity of aristocratic rule, moreover, were predicated upon the antiquity of its ancestry and the unique character of its marriage alliances. Most importantly, . . . the sexual and the political were unified within the aristocratic social order. Based as it was in the principles of unity and identity, kinship paid less heed to the logic of gender difference than it did to the metaphysically based purity of the individual and the cultural body. (72).

Since feudal marriages were stipulated primarily according to socio-political considerations, the concepts of romantic love and/or sexual attractiveness were not as pervasive as they are now, and the language of marriage and kinship had less to do with love and gender than it did with lineage and power.

In Cinderella, we have a pre-modern or early modern figure, a figure who still exists in a unified sexual and political system, a figure who has not yet experienced the disjunction of psycho-sexual and socio-political fact. The attraction of her story stems largely from the fact that it gives us access to this time, a time before sexual attraction and romantic love became dominant forces in kinship rituals and thus in the organization of society. The figure of Cinderella is attractive because it speaks to us of the now-rare possibility of experiencing personal fulfillment and political ascendancy in one unified (and moral) act. For Cinderella, sex and power cohere without moral qualm or cognitive dissonance. In modern bourgeois life, on the other hand, exogamy is prized over endogamy: to marry *up* is the highest good, and to this end the middle class fetishizes gender, sexual attractiveness, and romantic love. Ideally, bourgeois sexuality is

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supposed to function only in the realm of the personal and apolitical, but in practice it is pressed distressingly and contradictorily into the service of socio-political gain. The stepmother and stepsisters introduce these new concepts and practices into Cinderella's "pure" world of blood and lineage, and the tale records the clash of the two different sex-power systems as they co-exist for a moment in one family.

The difference between the two systems is most clearly delineated in the story's treatment of clothes. From the time that Cinderella is disrobed by the sisters, re-robed by her mother, and then found to fit the magic slipper, clothes are an important means by which class identity is both hidden and revealed. When the sisters want to demote Cinderella, they take away her fine clothes, but the clothes that then magically (re)appear are far better even than they. Not only do they re-establish her class identity, they reveal what the story conceives of as a metaphysical truth—the "natural" superiority of the higher ranks. The return of a stunning Cinderella sends the political message that what society would take away, God and magic will always again provide. Unlike the clothes she started with, Cinderella's God-given clothes are beyond interference or duplication. Social interlopers cannot take them away. Imposters cannot copy them. As long as the powers that be provide clothes like these, "rightful" class distinctions will persist. Thus, for the privileged class, fine clothes reveal "truth"; they are a means of maintaining the status quo. Conversely, for the aspiring class, clothes hide identity; they are a way of disrupting and manipulating social identity. The sisters' beautiful dresses are a disguise. They deceive, like costumes. The sisters' clothes have not only a negative function (to hide their identities), but also a positive function—to seduce. The sisters deck themselves out to amplify their sexual attractiveness. In this way, they hope to gain through sexual difference what they cannot claim through similarity of blood or character. Thus, clothes are a political tool of the petit-bourgeoisie: they are a means of spreading and valorizing a new cultural hegemony, one fraught with a sense of its own illegitimacy. In this scheme, concepts of sexuality, sexual attractiveness, and romantic love are woven together and pressed into the service of political gain.

Nowhere is petit-bourgeois strategizing more rigorously condemned than in the final struggle over Cinderella's golden shoe. The sisters, who are said to have "beautiful feet," find nonetheless that their feet are too big for the slipper. Under the direction of their mother, who tells them, "Once you become queen, you won't have to

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walk anymore" (Zipes 1987:91), one cuts off her toe and the other cuts off her heel. The two pigeons sitting in the hazel tree direct the prince's attention to the blood oozing from the shoes, saying of each sister in turn, "There's blood all over, and her foot's too small. / She's not the bride you met at the ball" (Zipes 1987:91). So the trick is exposed, and the sisters are returned to their mother. In the drama surrounding the shoe, the petit-bourgeois practice of sexual primping is carried to the extreme and exposed as monstrous and self-hating. Its root in class ambition is clearly shown, and the fairy tale brings both ambition and seduction to a fittingly pathetic end in self-mutilation and defeat. The fact that the sisters have mutilated themselves makes it easier for us to accept the blindness that Cinderella inflicts on them at the end of the story. Their final, brutal punishment can then be understood, not as a sudden and reprehensible excess of power, but as a mere elaboration of their own immorality. We are meant to understand that those who would change themselves to entice the other may be changed *by* another. Mutilation by self or other is the logical outcome of seduction/ambition. In this way the tale shrouds a political message inside a moral one: the sisters' blindness is seen as the symbol and culmination of their own tendency to self-destruction; it refers only obliquely to Cinderella's power. By drawing upon the well-known thematics of the moral universe, the tale accomplishes a dual political aim of legitimating violence against outsiders and maintaining its own fiction of moral concern and political non-involvement. In soundly defeating the sisters, and insisting on the essential difference between the true and the false brides, the fairy tale naturalizes class divisions, re-stating the necessity of maintaining the status quo against social pressures brought to bear on it.

Our "Cinderella"

When we compare the modern, cinematized version of "Cinderella" to the Grimms' tale, we find a subtle by unmistakable change in narrative emphasis and perspective. The heroine is no longer a true bride threatened by some coarse imposters, but a poor girl who triumphs over the glamorous and corrupt women of the monied class. Thus, the tale defends, not the right of the genteel-bourgeois to its separate social space, but the right of the petit-bourgeois to aspire and ascend. The petit-bourgeois are imagined, not as potential usurpers of power, but as the dispossessed victims of power. The social elitism

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of the Grimms' tale is overshadowed, though not replaced, by the more democratic-bourgeois idealism of the 1949 Disney film version.[4]

Disney's "popularization" of the folktale, in which the class dynamics shift slightly but significantly, is an instance of what Roland Barthes (1972:140) describes as bourgeois ideology's "penetration" into the "intermediate classes" and the subsequent "degradation" of "bourgeois truths." Like the Grimms' version, the popular Disney story does the work of haute-bourgeois culture, but it does it by transforming the original bourgeois ideological materials into what Barthes calls "petit-bourgeois norms." Barthes explains,

> Petit-bourgeois norms are the residue of bourgeois culture, they are bourgeois truths which have become degraded, impoverished, commercialized, slightly archaic, or shall we say out of date? . . . [T]he big wedding of the bourgeoisie, which originates in a class ritual (the display and consumption of wealth), can bear no relation to the economic status of the lower middle class: but through the press, the news, and literature, it slowly becomes the very norm as dreamed, though not actually lived, of the petit-bourgeois couple. [1972:140–1]

While the Grimms' version can be read as a defense or rationalization of upper class cohesiveness, the Disney version can be understood as the lower class's dream of participation in haute-bourgeois rituals. Thus, the modern Cinderella story is not much more than a wish-fulfillment. The real protagonist is not Cinderella at all but the petit-bourgeois reader who, with the help of the story, is able to do in imagination what she is much less likely to do in fact: she is able to penetrate the ranks of the bourgeoisie. Seeing the cinematized version of "Cinderella" (or reading any one of a number of modern variants of the tale directed toward the lower classes) is virtually synonymous with dreaming of being Cinderella, and the dream itself becomes a degraded form of participation in the dominant culture. The bourgeoisie offers the *story* of Cinderella to those who can never really *be* a Cinderella, and the reading of the story is a substitutive ritual for cultural groups denied participation in the actual ritual.

4. The Disney "Cinderella" is based on the Perrault (1982) version of the tale, first published in France in 1697. The fact that Disney chose to adapt the more watered-down Perrault version rather than the Grimms' version could be interpreted as an indication of the modern era's greater intolerance for female power. For a further discussion of the difference between the Grimms' and the Disney "Cinderella," see Yolen (1982). And for a discussion of the difference between the Perrault and the Grimms' "Cinderella," see Bettelheim (1976:251–2).

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Of course, the reader's dream of participation in haute-bourgeois rituals both soothes and exacerbates her painful awareness of her actual social exclusion from such rituals. The petit-bourgeois reader of "Cinderella" finds herself affirmed and negated in complex ways which ultimately serve to enlist her support for the status quo. Disney's Cinderella, for example, fulfills her dream by being exactly the opposite of what we would expect someone in her position to be. Forced to do all the hard work and abused by all those around her, she is neither angry, bitter, depressed, nor revolutionary. She is, in short, remarkably atypical, and she is chosen by the prince precisely for this reason. In the logic of the story, petit-bourgeois liberation depends upon the repression of petit-bourgeois class consciousness. The tale extolls the virtues of a falsely transcendent individual identity at the same time that it requires the denial of an authentic class identity. A reader who obligingly dreams of being Cinderella, then, signs a complicated social contract in which she agrees to carry the wish for what appears to her to be a promised haute-bourgeois identity over the repressed knowledge of her actual petit-bourgeois identity.

Now aspiration has ceased to be a moral defect; it is instead the very stuff of character. By the twentieth century, the pre-modern logic of honor (the idea that innate virtue represented an *a priori* social rank) is completely reversed by a sort of petit-bourgeois idealism which posits that moral stature precedes social stature, that people rise to power because they are good. (In this scheme, the existence of evil persons in prestigious positions is seen as monstrous, a gross error in social functioning.) For the modern Cinderella, having aspirations is a sign of character, and the possession of character leads inevitably to love and status. Unlike the Grimms' version, the Disney version thematizes Cinderella's dreaming, making a close connection between this (non-)activity and Cinderella's much-touted innate goodness. In the Disney version, merely the fact *that* Cinderella dreams is understood as sufficient cause for the fulfillment of her dream (see Yolen 1982:303). What is most irritating about the popular versions of "Cinderella" is the way that the repression of class consciousness is correlated to innate goodness and the way that dreaming (or non-activity) is correlated to a much-desired end result—i.e., marriage to a prince. The shock of Cinderella's sudden class transition at the end of the story is ameliorated by the sense that it is a just reward, a recognition of a prior condition (her goodness) and a result of what the reader

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must now presume to be a purposeful activity (her dreaming). By making Cinderella's marriage an apparently moral victory, the story manages to obscure its own socio-political dimensions: it gives the impression that the very class tensions which brought it into being are only illusory, without teeth, and that they can (and should) be overcome by virtually any erstwhile protagonist.

In the Disney "Cinderella," the dream of class transition is virtually inextricable from the dream of romantic love. Indeed, Cinderella's dream of love is primarily constituted by her yearning for freedom from servitude and the equally important desire to be found worthy of that freedom. Thus, Cinderella dreams not just of a man but of Prince Charming. The love of Prince Charming is far more valuable than the love of any other man because it releases her from the necessity of work and, insofar as it selects her from among so many, it deems her adequately deserving of membership in the leisure class. Only the love of a prince can heal all the class violence that poor, toiling Cinderella has experienced: his love is more than love; it is an end to oppression. What's more, to the extent that it makes the prince *her* servant, Cinderella's story reverses the usual (unjust) social hierarchy. Cinderella's marriage to the prince becomes a sort of social payback, a public recompense for the trauma of her former suffering.

Not surprisingly, the shift from a genteel-bourgeois to a petit-bourgeois narrative perspective is accompanied by the diminishment of the powerful mother's role. Unlike the Grimms' version, in which, as we have seen, the mother's role is of paramount importance, the Disney "Cinderella" trivializes the mother figure. The Disney version lacks any reference at all to the good mother and her death, and the fairy godmother who appears in her place functions as merely a magical wish-granter, like a genie. The rather abrupt appearance of the fairy godmother does not develop any of the story's moral or thematic needs; it works more or less as a mere plot mechanism, a way of getting Cinderella to the ball so that she can meet and marry the prince. Because the mother/daughter plot has been written out of the Disney version, the story lacks the moral depth, the political motivation, and the psychological resonance that give the Grimms' version shape and meaning.

This devaluation of the mother figure and the diminishment of the importance of the mother/daughter bond is a necessary part of the "taming" of "Cinderella." Indeed, the disempowerment of the mother figure is necessary to any patrilineal system. As Levy notes, "female

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sexual disorder" in the form of promiscuity and polyandry produces "uncertainty of fatherhood" and so leads to "a system of kinship through mothers only" (1989:79). What makes patrilineage possible is "female choice"—specifically, the choice to be sexually faithful to one man in a recognized marriage. Thus, says Levy, the rise of the middle class depends on the figure of the "orderly mother," a woman who practices sexual loyalty to her husband and thereby ensures "the requisite degree of sexual stability and order necessary for the recognition of patrilineage" (1989:80). Obviously, a woman who would have political ambitions or who would seek to base marriage on anything other than the affections would not only be outside the norm of middle class womanhood but would be threatening to it. One can imagine why, then, as bourgeois hegemony spreads, the politicized mother/daughter team would be written out of the culture's texts, and that any notion of female alliance for socio-political gain would become increasingly untenable and unrepresentable in literature.

The fact is that, in our world, the Grimms' Cinderella and her mother are sexually suspect. They take too much power in the marriage game. Their political ambition, not to mention their magic powers, puts them squarely in the realm of disorderly female figures. Modern "popularizations" and modern literary criticism attempt to neutralize the power of these figures, each in its own way. The Disney "Cinderella" writes out the mother/daughter plot, while much modern literary criticism represses it by holding to "authoritative" psychoanalytic paradigms. Both the dressing down of the story (in popularized versions) and the dressing up of the story (in genteel literary interpretations) share an unacknowledged agenda: they attempt to bring the story into line with bourgeois needs and expectations. By writing out or repressing evidence of a positive, politically effective mother/daughter bond—by misreading, if you will, the Cinderella story—they participate in the spread of bourgeois hegemony. In so doing, they camouflage exactly what is most troubling—and true—about the story, its depiction of class ambitions and class violence. If we want to understand the ways in which class tensions shape our social and personal realities, as well as the ways in which we use myths both to deny and to (selectively) reveal those tensions, we might start by reading the Grimms' "Cinderella" as an exploration into what was (and still is) a common cultural experience—i.e., class ascension/descension through marriage.

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